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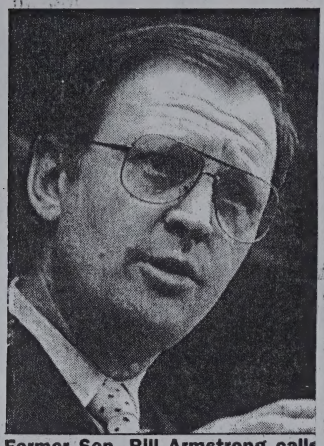

Former Sen. Bill Armstrong calls gays "tragically misguided people" in letter.

Armstrong against gay rights

Ex-senator's letter backs petition drive

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Associated Press

DENVER — Former U.S. Sen. Bill Armstrong says homosexuals are trying to gain taxpayer support for their fight against AIDS, an epidemic he says was "self-created" by "pleasure-addicted gays."

In a letter seeking financial support for a ballot initiative to block new civil rights protection for gays, Armstrong said homosexuals are trying to "force you and me to condone and give our state's legal blessing to aberrant homosexual behavior and lifestyle."

Armstrong called on Coloradans to turn back "a very grave threat" from gays who also want taxpayer support in their fight against AIDS.

The letter blames the AIDS epidemic on the "self-created personal miseries of pleasure-addicted gays" and said comparing that "with the innocent sufferings and crippling poverty of legitimate minority groups is an insult to those who've struggled to achieve true civil rights in America."

A gay leader said the letter contains "blatant lies." A former Armstrong supporter called it "vile" and said it was laced with "unsubstantiated and inflammatory rhetoric."

The letter, which filled four, single-spaced typewritten pages, was mailed by Colorado for Family Values. The Colorado Springs group is fighting gay rights at all levels and on Friday presented 85,500 signatures to Secretary of State Natalie Meyer to have their initiative placed on the November ballot.

Armstrong is on the organization's advisory board, along with University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney.

Armstrong's letter said taxpayers shouldn't have to pay insurance costs for AIDS patients, 85 percent of whom are gay, because they are affluent and have average annual salaries of $55,500. In an interview, Armstrong said he got the salary figure from The Wall Street Journal.

The letter says that gays have an average of 500 sex partners in a lifetime, a figure Armstrong said he got from the Kinsey Institute, and that they care nothing for traditional families, religion or moral values.

Gays, whom he described in the letter as "tragically misguided people," are attempting to secure civil rights guarantees equal to, and beyond, those now enjoyed by "legitimate racial, ethnic and religious groups," he wrote.

Armstrong, a Republican who spent 12 years in the U.S. Senate, six in the U.S. House and eight in the Colorado House of Representatives, said he finds it "reprehensible" that gays might be mistreated because of their sexual preference, but contends they already have the same protection as other citizens. He said he and a staff member at Colorado for Family Values wrote the letter and he "fully authorized" its contents and distribution.

A Denver gay leader said Armstrong is wrong in portraying gays as pleasure-addicted.

"I challenge him to furnish any information to support such charges," said the Rev. Julian Rush, a gay man and director of the Colorado AIDS Project.

Rush also termed a "blatant lie" Armstrong's statement that gays are against traditional family, religion and moral values.

"Many gay people have families and many are involved in traditional religion. He is looking for religious dogma to back up his position of bigotry," said Rush, a United Methodist minister.